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ABSTRACT

Adapting the implications of schema theory to the practical endeavors of the community college literature classroom can be readily accomplished within the framework of guided reading activities that prepare students for critical reading and analysis of short stories. Guided readings focus on what prior knowledge/experience and what aspects of story structure might be useful to students in creating some identification with a story and some sense of its organization. The guided reading activity (usually a list of questions and suggestions in outline form) directs the reader to note certain aspects of the story, hints at certain important relationships, calls for associations between story content and the reader's knowledge/experience (schemata), asks questions to stimulate further tnought and active involvement with the story, and requires that conclusions be drawn and applications made to the "real world." (Examples of guided reading activity outlines are appended for Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party," Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," and Dorothy Parker's "Big Blonde.") (BL)

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Implications of Schema Theory for the Guided Reading of Short Stories

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Implications of Schema Theory for the Guided Reading of Short Stories

Community College students, given their non-traditional range of characteristics, typically exhibit a multiplicity of difficulties when reading and interpreting literature, particularly short stories. Why this situation exists is the subject of considerable discussion. Maxwell (1979) indicates that at the institutional level, we are confronted by the convergence of numerous complex forces, including open admissions, federal programs offering greater access for educationally disadvantaged, noticeable declines in basic skills, and grade inflation, all of which suggests a lack of prior academic and related experience. More specifically, various studies (Adams, 1980; Olshavsky, 1976-77; Golinkoff, 1975-76) and classroom experiences at all levels indicate a high proportion of students apply relatively low-level reading skills to the literature, such as word-for-word processing and limited literal interpretation, while ignoring the potential of flexible strategies, text structure, visualization, and similar fluent reading skills associated with good readers.

Fortunately, in recent years considerable research has focused on understanding the nature of the comprehension process and a number of pedagogical implications emerge from this interest (Durkin, 1981). It is the purpose of this paper to examine, in particular, the implications of schema theory as a basis for understanding the fluent reading process and to present a "guided reading" methodology for teaching students viable strategies for reading literature in the context of a short story class.

Schema Theory

Schema theory is essentially an information processing model of communication which stresses the interaction between an individual's knowledge of the world and the characteristic information presented in a particular situation as a basis for derived meaning (Anderson et al., 1976). Inasmuch as schema theory examines "the representation of knowledge in memory," Rumelhart and Ortony (1977:101) indicate that

> Schemata are data structures for representing the generic concepts stored in memory. They exist for generalized concepts underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions, and sequences of actions. Schemata are not atomic. A schema contains, as part of its specification, the network of interrelations that is believed to generally hold among the constituents of the concepts in question. Schemata, in some sense, represent stereotypes of these concepts. Although it oversimplifies the matter somewhat, it may be useful to think of schema as analogous to a play with the internal structure of the schema corresponding to the script of the play A schema is related to a particular instance of the concept that it represents in much the same way that a play is related to a particular enactment of that play.

In addition, Rumelhart (1980) suggests that schemata function like theories in formulating an interpretation of a situation in order to comprehend the situation. Moreover, these are "active processes" with "recognition devices" to determine the "goodness of fit" of the information being processed.

The interaction between the reader and the text, a primary focus of psycholinguists studying the fluent reading process (Cooper and Petrosky, 1976; Smith, 1971; Goodman, 1970a, 1970b), is of considerable importance for understanding the comprehension process since it is the success or failure of this interaction which determines the appropriateness of the schemata used to understand text. Within this interaction, both "concept-driven" (for example, interpretation guided by higher level concepts utilizing prior experience) and "data-driven" (for example, interpretation guided by examination of individual parts such as features analysis) processes are simultaneously at work to provide an understanding of text (Adams and Collins, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980). This interaction between the reader and the text, in the context of schema theory, suggests that a message is comprehended 1) when there is a correspondence between relevant schemata and characteristics of the message allowing for a sense of comprehension, 2) when the information of text can be additionally inferred through the knowledge structure of the schemata for a more coherent interpretation of the message, and 3) when the high-level schemata allow readers to perceive messages in a particular way, thereby providing a method for comprehending discourse (Anderson, et al,1976; Anderson, et al, 1977). Ultimately, any schema can be viewed as a "cognitive template" against which new information is examined for comprehension (Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977).

Schemata for Reading

Recognizing schemata as knowledge structures containing slots of information under general headings and comprehension as a condition which takes

place when enough slots are filled by a one-to-one correspondence between characteristics in the message and information in the slots, including inferential additions to the knowledge structure, Canney and Winograd (1979) report research which indicates that reading is also a process requiring schemata for how to read and what strategies to employ in various reading situations. Interestingly enough, it was found that while an awareness of the reading process increases across grade levels (grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 were studied), higher comprehenders exhibited greater awareness of "meaning focused" reading than lower comprehenders at every level, with the latter attending primarily to the more mechanical aspects of reading. Finally, it was concluded that there is a relationship between students' awareness of reading as a "meaning getting" activity and their comprehension performance and that attention must be given to the meaning focus as a principle aspect of schemata for reading (see also, Adams, 1980).

Extending the perspective of schemata for reading are three different avenues of study, including story grammars, comprehension monitoring, and background knowledge. Research focusing on the importance of story grammars and its implications for the learning process is in its infancy; yet a variety of insights can be gleaned from current studies. Mandler and Johnson (1977) note, for instance, that story schema refers to a set of expectations concerning the internal structure of stories and that this representation of story facilitates both comprehension and memory. Furthermore, the schema acts to focus attention on particular aspects of information, to keep track of the information, and to decide when part of a story is complete or needs more information. Their model of story grammar suggests a basic structure

involving settings, beginnings, reactions, attempts (including actions), outcomes, and endings. The greater the correspondence between story schema and story grammar, the greater the comprehension and the recall (see also, McClure and Mason, 1979).

Rumelhart (1977) suggests that most brief stories involve problem-solving episodes including four variables: the protagonist, the initiating event, the goal, and the outcome of the problem-solving attempt. In addition, a "Try" schema is specified to account for the internal structure of the episode, including the trier, the method and any preconditions, the goal, and the consequence of the attempt; there is also an outcome when attempting to meet preconditions. The "goodness of fit" between schema and story grammar, or the degree of comprehension, then can be discerned by summaries organizing important information.

Finally, while research into the "psychological correlates of text structure" (Goetz and Armbruster, 1980) continues, McConaughy (1980) suggests that studerts can benefit from the study of story grammars by systematic instruction, particularly attention to story structure and story summaries, thereby progressing from simple description, through information processing to social inference summaries, or levels of interpretation. The summarizing of stories provides the basis for organizing information in memory while details then can be reconstructed from that schema (see also, Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977).

Congruent with perspective of schemata for reading is the current concern with comprehension monitoring apparent in the studies of Olshavsky

(1976-77), Baker (1979), Collins and Smith (1980), and Baker and Brown (1980). As Baker (1979:2) points out "Comprehension monitoring involves the evaluation and regulation of one's own ongoing comprehension processes." Research examining this process suggests that there are a variety of strategies involved in the process, such as awareness of purpose, monitoring of ongoing comprehension, and deployment of compensatory strategies in the face of failure, indicating that good readers not only keep track of their comprehension but also deal with difficulties that arise, and that although poor readers do not tend to spontaneously monitor their comprehension, they are capable of such with instruction (Baker and Brown, 1980).

From an instructional perspective, Collins and Smith (1980) provide a number of specific instructional procedures for comprehension monitoring and hypothesis testing for the purpose of "teaching the process of reading comprehension," while Baker and Brown (1980) suggest a series of metacognitive skills which form a basis for a reading for meaning schema, including 1) clarifying purposes, 2) identifying important aspects of the message, 3) focusing attention on major issues, 4) monitoring the degree of comprehension, 5) engaging in self-questioning with reference to purpose and comprehension, and 6) taking corrective action when confronted with confusion. In a sense, what good readers have and poor readers need is a processing strategy for the construction of meaning.

Throughout this presentation background knowledge has served as an underlying assumption supporting the schemata which guide the interaction between reader and text. In fact, background knowledge/prior experience is the basis for existing schemata and, therefore, the basis for deriving

meaning from and making interpretations with new knowledge. Adams and Bruce (1980) suggest there are three forms of background knowledge important to the comprehension of text: conceptual knowledge (language and meaning), social knowledge (intention and meaning, particularly the social relations among characters), and story knowledge (stereotype characters, genre characteristics, and story structure). It is the interaction between reader and text in each of these areas, separately and simultaneously, which facilitates or impedes comprehension. From this perspective then, extending the range of these knowledge structures will enhance the possibilities for comprehension; therefore, a related consequence of schema theory is that "reading comprehension must be placed in a context of experiencing, thinking about, and talking about the world" (Adams and Bruce, 1980:36).

As the transition from theory to practice is made with this presentation, it is important to keep the following ideas in mind. To facilitate the comprehension process from the perspective of schema theory, it is necessary 1) to make readers aware of their active role in the construction of meaning, particularly through the use of background knowledge and a focus on interpretation, 2) to provide readers with processing and monitoring strategies for reading and remembering, 3) to provide readers with opportunities to expand their knowledge of story structure as an aid to comprehension, 4) to extend readers facilities for expanding and refining schemata through summarization efforts which allow for the reconstruction of story from memory, and 5) to offer readers experience in examining the interrelationships among conceptual knowledge, social knowledge, and story knowledge.

Guided Reading as Schemata

Adapting the implications of schema theory to the practical endeavors of the classroom can be readily accomplished within the framework of guided reading activities. The educational writings of Herber (1970; 1978), Stauffer (1969a; 1969b), and, to some extent, Manzo (1975) have established a focus on guided reading activities as an instructional methodology emphasizing cognitive process in reading for meaning. Herber (1970), for example, presents an "instructional framework" which includes a guidance stage utilizing reading guides at various levels of comprehension to direct the reader through an interactive reading-thinking process. Stauffer (1969a; 1969b) with his "directed reading-thinking activity" has also focused on the interaction between the reader and the text and the interaction between reading and thinking by involving readers in a step-by-step process of "declaring purposes, reasoning while reading, judging" and also "refining and extending ideas." Essentially, guided reading activities attempt to enhance the cognitive processing of written information.

The guided readings examined below are a product of three years of classroom application (community college, short story) of the implications of schema theory and combine the view that reading is a process requiring schemata and that guided reading activities can establish the appropriate correspondence between reading and thinking, a correspondence of utmost importance to comprehension. It should also be understood that these guided reading activities are but one vital stage in a learning process which includes 1) preparation for the activity, 2) application of the guided

readings individually, 3) discussion in small groups of individual experience, 4) examination of various interpretations, and finally 5) application of similar reading strategies independently to unfamiliar stories as a method for judging competency.

Prior Knowledge and Story Structure

The guided reading initially focuses on establishing what prior knowledge/experience and what aspects of story structure might be useful in creating some identification with a story and some sense of its organization, or presentation. Since the guided reading should promote an awareness of the importance of prior experience as a tool for deriving meaning from a story, the first stage of the guide might offer the following information for Mansfield's "The Garden Party" (1978):

> Prior Experience: Your understanding of Mansfield's "The Garden Party" will be facilitated if you apply your prior experience with people from different backgrounds to the examination and interpretation of Laura, the protagonist, and her experience. The story is essentially a study of contrasts as they emerge from social class differences experienced by Laura. Since Laura is the focal point of the story, she should be examined with reference to 1) her experience with her social environment (How do one's surroundings affect one's life?), 2) her perception of her situation (Why are similarities and differences in perception possible among people in particular circumstances?), and 3) her emotional reaction to the circumstances of her life (What separates people's lives and/or what draws them together?).

Initially the prior experience portion of the guide is fairly directive; the reader is to focus on certain key aspects of the story and to ask certain critical questions. In addition, this portion of the guide could introduce a point of literary analysis, such as the discussion of character development in the guided reading for Parker's "Big Blonde" (1978) or it could present a brief overview of the subject, such as the reading for Jackson's "The Lottery" (1978) (see Appendix). Whatever the approach, the directive approach is eventually phased out as the reader becomes aware of the significance of considering prior knowledge/experience and employs such knowledge when reading.

The second stage of a guided reading activity considers story structure and its inclusion in the guide gives recognition to the fact that the organization of a story influences both how a story is read and how various interpretations emerge. For instance, early experience with stories provides readers with the knowledge that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends, and continuing experience will increase readers' knowledge of various elements of story and interpretation. Therefore, an increased sensitivity to structure will be an aid for examining works of varying complexity, such as a shift from simple plot structure to story "form." Again using the Mansfield story as an example, the "story structure" is a detailed preparation for reading:

Story Structure:

"The Garden Party" begins with a rather precise description of setting and the introduction of Laura, the protagonist, as preparations are being made for a party. As the story continues,

various characters are introduced and developed around the activities of the day; the attitudes and social values presented during this stage of the story establish a framework for later developments and interpretation. Then a major change in the direction of the story, the source of conflict, comes with the news of a workingman's death nearby. For Laura, this creates an obvious reaction followed by confusion, while the continuous preparation for the party and the views of her family suppress for the moment the contradiction between sorrowful death and joyful celebration. Yet, finally, the resolution to this conflict will come for Laura in the final segment of the story.

While additional examples are presented in the Appendix, what is essential in the construction of the guide is a concern with readers' use of story structure to handle complex form and to derive meaning by acknowledging the relationship between form and meaning.

Guided Reading

Although the total process being discussed is considered a guided reading activity, the readers' specific involvement with a story, the actual reading, is here labeled "guided reading." At this point, we are perhaps closest to the particular concerns of Herber and Stauffer. The guided reading stage involves a series of interrelated steps, steps which cumulatively lead the reader through a story. This is a critical stage in creating the correspondence between reading and thinking.

Basically, the guided reading directs the reader to note certain aspects of the story, hints at certain important relationships, calls for association between story content and the reader's knowledge/experience, asks questions to stimulate further thought and active involvement with the story, and requires conclusions be drawn and applications made to the "real world." For example, a "guided reading" for "The Garden Party" might proceed through the following steps:

Guided Reading:

I. As you begin the story, note the setting of the introductory paragraph; what type of environment is described? What quality of life is suggested?

(Note that the first step directs the reader to consider the setting, to draw some conclusion concerning its nature and to examine its meaning; this is essentially preparation for the introduction of characters.)

II. As Laura is introduced, particularly in terms of her interaction with the working men, there is the suggestion of the relationships between oneself and social class. Describe, or form an image of, Laura as a character by examining similarities and differences with your own character.

(At this stage, attention is directed toward character, toward potential contrasts, and toward an association between self and literature as an aid to interpretation. The following steps continue in a similar manner.)

III. You can understand quite a bit about Laura by following the development of her "mother's character" and by contrasting this with Laura's character. How are they similar/different? What social attitudes do they represent?

IV. A major shift in the mood of the story comes with the death of the carter and Laura's reaction. Note the social circumstances suggested by the setting of the cottages and the attitudes suggested by Laura's dialogue with Jose.

V. In terms of Laura's appeal to mother and mother's response, what set of attitudes is mother attempting to instill? Laura's reaction?

VI. The party for which we have been prepared is perfect; yet, with its close, reemerges the issue of the carter's death as presented sympathetically by the father. Note difference in attitude between the mother and the father. What might be the source of the difference? Effect on Laura? Contrast appearance and reality.

VII. Ultimately Laura must journey beyond the boundaries of her class and her circumstance and what initially emerge are mixed feelings and fears. Yet, the experience leads Laura to a new understanding of her life, an understanding which is both marvelous and ironic. What has Laura learned? What separates people's lives? What draws them together?

In its final steps, a "guided reading" should always consider potential interpretations and questions which suggest a correspondence between literature and life (see material in Appendix).

The guided reading activity as presented here is designed to enhance the reader's awareness of the need to consider prior knowledge and experience when reading, to sensitize the reader to the significance of story structure, and to provide the reader with a step-by-step procedure for processing information. Ultimately, the activity should lead the reader through a story in ways which correspond to our knowledge of the "fluent reading process" and "the representation of knowledge in memory."

Additional Considerations

To gain the greatest benefits from the guided reading activity, there are a few additional considerations. First, it seems very important to prepare readers for this activity by explaining the importance of self-awareness in seeking a correspondence between reading and thinking. This seems particularly helpful in reinforcing reading as a meaning-getting activity and it also supports the need for using evidence from a story to make interpretations. Secondly, McConaughy (1980) has noted the importance of using story summaries as a basis for determining important information to be considered in interpretation. This point can be extended from an experiential perspective to the importance of written response to the specific steps in the "guided reading." To clearly articulate the facts of a story and the answers to specific questions allows the reader to use the guided reading as a source of comprehension monitoring. Further, if these responses are kept in journals, the reading process can be more closely monitored by the instructor, allowing for additional guidance.

Thirdly, readers should be given direction in the use of conceptual, social, and story knowledge (Adams and Bruce, 1980) as a method increasing awareness of what is most significant in the examination of stories and what contributes most to the interpretation of story. Finally, to allow readers to reach a point of independence is absolutely necessary to the development of schemata for reading short stories. As guided reading activities enhance the reader's awareness of how the reading process works and what reading strategies can be applied in a variety of reading situations, ultimate independence must be the goal of the activities so that readers gain the capabilities for a lifetime of reading. Enjoyment comes with understanding and independence.

APPENDIX

Guided Reading for Mansfield's "The Garden Party"

Directions: Follow each of the stages of this guide to facilitate your reading of "The Garden Party." Read the sections on "Prior Experience" and "Story Structure" as a basis for preparing yourself for the story and then follow the steps of the guide as you read through the story. The guide and the story are read together.

Prior Experience: Your understanding of Mansfield's "The Garden Party" will be facilitated if you apply your prior experience with people from different backgrounds to the examination and interpretation of Laura, the protagonist, and her experience. The story is essentially a study of contrasts as they emerge from social class differences experienced by Laura. Since Laura is the focal point of the story, she should be examined with reference to 1) her experience with her social environment (How do one's surroundings affect one's life?), 2) her perception of her situation (Why are similarities and differences in perception possible among people in particular circumstances?), and 3) her emotional reaction to the circumstances of her life (What separates people's lives and/or what draws them together?).

Guided Reading:

I. As you begin the story, note the setting of the introductory paragraph; what type of environment is described? What quality of life is suggested?

II. As Laura is introduced, particularly in terms of her interaction with the working men, there is the suggestion of the relationships

between oneself and social class. Describe, or form an image of, Laura as a character by examining similarities and differences with your own character.

III. You can understand quite a bit about Laura by following the development of her "mother's character" and by contrasting this with Laura's character. How are they similar/different? What social attitudes do they represent?

IV. A major shift in the mood of the story comes with the death of the carter and Laura's reaction. Note the social circumstances suggested by the setting of the cottages and the attitudes suggested by Laura's dialogue with Jose.

V. In terms of Laura's appeal to mother and mother's response, what set of attitudes is mother attempting to instill? Laura's reaction?

VI. The party for which we have been prepared is perfect, yet, with its close, reemerges the issue of the carter's death as presented sympathetically by the father. Note difference in attitude between the mother and the father. What might be the source of the difference? Effect on Laura? Contrast appearance and reality.

VII. Ultimately Laura must journey beyond the boundaries of her class and her circumstance and what initially emerge are mixed feelings and fears. Yet, the experience leads Laura to a new understanding of her life, an understanding which is both marvelous and ironic. What has Laura learned? What separates people's lives/What draws them together?

Guided Reading for

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

Directions: The purpose of this guide is to facilitate your reading and understanding of "The Lottery." Your reading will be most successful if you use your prior experience and your knowledge of stories to promote your understanding and interpretation. You should read the sections on "Prior Experience" and "Story Structure" first, and then follow the steps of the guide while reading the story. The guide and the story are read together.

Prior Experience: Jackson's "The Lottery" is a short, yet powerful, piece examining an episode in the tradition of a small town. The thematic concerns are many and should be allowed to grow naturally out of the story, the types of characters presented, and the "lottery's" conclusion. Consider, what do you know about small towns, their traditions, and lotteries?

Story Structure: The plot of "The Lottery" is fairly clear cut with an introduction to the village, followed by a description of the lottery and its connection with the past; various characters are introduced as the event of the lottery proceeds and while some complications develop, the lottery leads to a rapid conclusion with significant implications. Follow the development of the story and look for points which relate one aspect of plot with another.

Guided Reading:

I. As you read the story, first try to imagine the village and the people gathering for the event--it's a morning, clear and sunny;

people gather in the square. Create, in your mind, a visual image of the event.

II. Next, as the lottery and its history are presented, try to imagine its purpose--what was it like and how has it changed?

III. The characters in this story seem to represent attitudes and experiences, character types, rather than fully developed individuals. Therefore, try to figure out what points of view they represent. What they do and/or say will guide you toward a response.

Mr. Summers:

Old Man Warner:

Mr. & Mrs. Adams:

Mrs. Hutchinson:

Bill Hutchinson:

IV. With the beginning of the lottery, "a sudden hush fell on the crowd . . . they had done it so many times . . . they grinned at one another humorlessly and nervously." While reading this section of the story, it is important to see what is happening and to compare it with the reaction of the participants. Hence, what feelings are expressed; do the feelings seem related to the events; what seems to be foreshadowed?

V. What is Tessie Hutchinson's reaction to the selection of her family; how is this a change in attitude from earlier; why this change in heart over the fairness of the lottery?

VI. "Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones." With this statement, you are quickly led through the conclusion of the story and can now consider its meaning within the context of the work and the context of human experience.

Guided Reading for Parker's

"Big Blonde"

Directions: Read the material below on "Prior Experience" and "Story Structure" before starting "Big Blonde," and then follow the steps in the guide while reading the story.

Prior Experience: Characterization is a most important facet of fiction; it is generally the focus of a work and a major point of association between the reader and the literature. Character, and it's development, is presented to the reader in a variety of ways. A character is understood through 1) the author's description, 2) the character's actions or behavior in various situations and 3) the reactions of others to the character, 4) the character's conversation with others and 5) thoughts about such and finally 6) the conversation and thoughts of others relative to the character.

The fact of the matter is that we come to understand and judge characters in fiction in a manner similar to that used for understanding and judging character in real life circumstances. How do we judge the character of those we encounter? We label their behavior, their use of language, and their appearance. We also make assumptions about future attitudes and behaviors based on conclusions drawn from prior experience. The same process can be used with literature.

Story Structure: This story is divided into four episodes; the initial episodes provide a reasonably in depth view of character and experience while the last two are brief and essentially reflect experience. The story appears true-to-life; yet, the protagonist is presented as a character type. This

presentation then allows the story to be interpreted literally with reference to character and symbolically with character as a symbol of a larger concern.

Guided Reading:

I. As the story begins, note the author's description of Hazel Morse and try to form an image in your mind of her appearance.

II. Swiftly the character of Hazel develops; she is married and one immediately senses contradictory feelings she has about her life. What are her attitudes, feelings, points of contradiction?

III. Hazel's marriage to Herbie is fraught with conflicts which keep the two constantly on edge. Why is there such conflict? What motivates the two people? How do their personalities clash?

IV. As the story progresses, we encounter Mrs. Martin and Hazel's relief from her apartment existence. What type of character is Mrs. Martin and how does Hazel's experience at Mrs. Martin's parallel earlier life experiences? What is Hazel's feeling concerning Herbie's departure?

V. In part II, we see Hazel playing out the lifestyle of the "Big Blonde" who leads a happy-go-lucky existence as a companion to men of moderate wealth. Yet, again there is the contradiction of emotion, the conflict between demanded gaiety and felt sadness. How does this existence bring forth these conflicting emotions? What is the nature of human relationships for Hazel and others? Why is Hazel led to take her own life?

VI. In part III, Hazel's life is saved and the Doctor leaves the reader with the interesting view that "You couldn't kill her with an ax." Why not? What in the nature of her existence makes her so enduring?

VII. In the final stage of the story, part IV, Hazel is steadily drawn back to the life of demanded gaiety, an existence which forces one to be happy and Hazel's reaction, "without knowing a God," is "Oh, please, please, let her be able to get drunk, please keep her always drunk." What has led Hazel to this point? To what extent is her personality the motivating force? To what extent the social situation? Are there any options available to Hazel? And what is the author's point?

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